

LIMITED
RAND STAFF ONLY
MEMORANDUM

15 Rev. (7-55)

TO: Charles Wolf

FROM: Hans Heymann, Jr.

SUBJECT: AID/VIETNAM PROGRAM REVIEW CONFERENCE

DATE: 9/16/68

MEMO NO. WM-1282

COPIES TO: C. Cooper, D. Ellsberg, S. Hosmer, F. Ikle, R. Rainey, G. Shubert,
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Over the past weekend I participated, at the invitation of Jim Grant, Assistant AID Administrator for Vietnam, in a two and one-half day program review conference at Annapolis, Maryland. (List of participants attached.) The purpose of the conference was to prepare the AID/VN Bureau for the upcoming FY 70 program structuring exercise and, probably more important, to do some advance homework for the expected A-to-Z reassessment of the US role in Vietnam which any new administration is bound to undertake between November and January.

As you would expect of affairs of this kind, the conference did not exactly soar, but there were some highlights:

(1) Jim Grant and Joe Mendenhall (Jim's new Deputy, replacing Roy Wehrle) had just returned from a two-week visit to Saigon, and were brimming with the ebullience and confidence that a brief exposure to the US/Saigon Establishment appears to evoke in people these days. This confidence, however, was quickly challenged and, I think, badly shaken by the views expressed by several conference participants and particularly by a grimly realistic assessment of the present situation and near-term prospects by George Allen of CIA who has been in the Vietnam game almost uninterruptedly since 1950.

(2) Compared to earlier similar conferences I have attended, (e.g., one in Honolulu in 1967), the level of political sophistication of this one was substantially higher. There was serious questioning of the relevance of AID's benefit-conferring projects for U.S. security objectives in the Vietnamese countryside. There was recognition of the importance of local power structures and their relationship to the Saigon GVN. Indeed, a new acronym has been coined: LOPEL -- which stands for "local power elites." Sam Huntington's writings on this subject have evidently made an impact. But there was also the same old inability to bridge the gap between sophisticated concepts and program practicalities. Neither U.S. nor GVN has the capacity to translate one into the other. I was reminded of Dick Moorsteen's sage observation that "no AID program in Vietnam can work unless it is designed to be carried out by cretins."

(3) The gap between ambitions and realities is at its widest in the area of pacification. There was a long recital of the "new" pacification objectives for 1969, with much self-congratulation on the success in having cut down this year's "national priority areas" to only the most critical population centers. There was also an enthusiastic description of the "new" eight priority programs which

will receive most urgent attention. But the ensuing recital of current problems and past failures made it abundantly clear that quick progress in pacification is still the grand illusion it's always been. The two indispensable prerequisites to pacification -- a reasonable level of territorial security and a weakened VC infrastructure -- are still more fantasies than realities. Of the 51 ARVN battalions detailed to pacification last year, only 31 are still so assigned and a mere handful is active. RF/PF is supposed to fill the void, but that will take a year or more. The much-touted PHOENIX program (a coordinated intelligence effort to locate and neutralize the Viet Cong political apparatus) is still only an American enterprise with minimal and most reluctant GVN participation. The grim current state of pacification comes through very clearly in a surprisingly restrained paper "Thoughts on Pacification" which has just been submitted to Washington by the normally much more sanguine Komer establishment. I have a copy if anyone is interested.

(4) The conference participants paid much lip service to future uncertainties and less-than-satisfactory outcomes in Vietnam but when the discussion turned to programs, they reverted to old habits of "pushing the inputs" regardless of their relevance, and preoccupation with economic development and post-war reconstruction for a fully pacified Vietnam. The highly ambiguous situation which is the best we can hope for over the next several years was mentioned as a possible contingency and then quickly passed-by in favor of more comforting alternatives. Development of meaningful program criteria for any realistic FY 70 situation was carefully shunned. The BOB types present were in despair.

There was some questioning of possible RAND help on some of the programming and economic policy problems that now confront AID/Washington. Whether in fact there is anything we would be willing or able to do will depend in the first instance, I feel, on what sort of dialogue AID/Washington develops with the Mission in Saigon. At the moment there is almost none, but a new round of discussions is planned. In that connection I hope that, when (or should I say "if"?) Chuck Cooper returns to Santa Monica he will be able to visit here at an early moment. He could shed some much needed light on a number of murky points.



Hans Heymann, Jr.

HH: jg